

Poetical Works
or
LORD BYRON



La fontaine au 1

The Works
OF
LORD BYRON

A NEW REVISED AND ENLARGED EDITION
WITH ILLUSTRATIONS

Poetry Vol V

EDITED BY
ERNEST HARTLEY COLERIDGE M A
HON F R S L

LONDON
JOHN MURRAY, ALBEMARLE STREET
NEW YORK CHARLES SCRIBNERS SONS

1901

PREFACE TO THE FIFTH VOLUME

THE plays and poems contained in this volume were written within the space of two years—the last two years of Byron's career as a poet. But that was not all. Cantos VI—XV of *Don Juan*, *The Vision of Judgment*, *The Blues*, *The Irish Avatar*, and other minor poems belong to the same period. The end was near, and as though he had received a warning, he hastened to make the roll complete.

Proof is impossible, but the impression remains that the greater part of this volume has been passed over and left unread by at least two generations of readers. Old playgoers recall Macready as 'Werner' and many persons have read *Cam*, but apart from students of literature, readers of *Sardanapalus* and of *The Two Foscari* are rare, of *The Age of Bronze* and *The Island* rarer still. A few of Byron's later poems have shared the fate of Southey's epics, and, yet, with something of Southey's persistence, Byron believed that posterity would weigh his regular dramas in a fresh balance and that his

heedless critics would kick the beam But "can these bones live"? Can dramas which excited the wondering admiration of Goethe and Lamartine and Sir Walter Scott touch or lay hold of the more adventurous reader of the present day? It is certain that even the half-forgotten works of a great and still popular poet, which have left their mark on the creative imagination of the poets and playwrights of three quarters of a century, will always be studied by the few from motives of curiosity, or for purposes of reference, but it is improbable, though not impossible, that in the revolution of taste and sentiment, moribund or extinct poetry will be born again into the land of the living Poetry which has never had its day, such as Blake's *Songs of Innocence*, the *Lyrical Ballads*, or Fitzgerald's *Omar Khayyám*, may come, in due time, to be recognized at its full worth; but it is a harder matter for a poem which has lost its vogue to recapture the interest and enthusiasm of the many.

Byron is only an instance in point Bygone poetry has little or no attraction for modern readers This poem or that drama may be referred to, and occasionally examined in the interests of general culture, or in support of a particular belief or line of conduct, as a classical or quasi-scriptural authority, but, with the rarest exceptions, plays and narrative poems are not read spontaneously or with any genuine satisfaction or delight An old-world poem which will not yield up its secret to the idle reader "of an empty day" is more or less

“rudely dismissed without even a show of favour or hospitality

And yet these forgotten works of the imagination are full of hidden treasures! There is not one of Byron's ‘impressionist studies’ of striking episodes of history or historical legend flung as it were, with a “Take it or leave it” in the face of friend or foe, which does not transform names and shadows into persons and substance, which does not contain lines and passages of unquestionable beauty and distinction

But some would have it that Byron's plays as a whole, are dull and uninspiring monotonous harpings on worn-out themes which every one has mastered or wishes to forget. A close study of the text, together with some knowledge of the subject as it presented itself to the author and arrested *his* attention may compel these impatient critics to a different conclusion. Byron did not scruple to refer the reader to his ‘sources’ and was at pains to publish, in the notes and appendices to his dramas and poems long extracts from old chronicles from Plutarch's *Lives* from French and Italian histories which he had read himself and, as he fondly believed, would be read by others who were willing to submit themselves to his guidance. He expected his readers to take some trouble and to display some intelligence

Poetry is successful only so far as it is intelligible. To a clear cry an answer comes but not to a muffled call. The reader who comes within speaking distance

of his author can hear him, and to bring the living within speaking distance of the dead, the living must know the facts, and understand the ideas which informed and inspired the dead. Thought and attention are scarcely to be reckoned among necromantic arts, but thought and knowledge "can make these bones live," and stand upon their feet, if they do not leap and sing.

I desire to renew my acknowledgments of the generous assistance of the officials of the British Museum, and, more especially, of Mr. Ernest Wallis Budge, Litt D, M A, *Keeper of Egyptian and Assyrian Antiquities*, of Mr. Leonard W King, M.A., of the same department, and of Mr George F Barwick, *Superintendent of the Reading Room*.

To Dr. Garnett, C B, I am greatly indebted for invaluable hints and suggestions with regard to the interpretation of some obscure passages in *The Age of Bronze* and other parts of the volume, and for reading the proofs of the "Introduction" and "Note to the Introduction to *Werner*."

I have also to acknowledge the assistance and advice of Mr. W Hale White, and of my friend Mr Frank E. Taylor, of Chertsey.

For assistance during the preparation of the volume, and more especially in the revision of proofs, I desire to express my cordial thanks to Mr. John Murray.

ERNEST HARTLEY COLERIDGE

December 3, 1901

CONTENTS OF VOL V



	PAGE
Preface to Vol V of the Poems	v
SARDANAPALUS A TRAGEDY	
Introduction to <i>Sardanapalus</i>	3
Dedication	7
Preface	9
<i>Sardanapalus</i>	13
THE TWO FOSCARI AN HISTORICAL TRAGEDY	
Introduction to <i>The Two Foscari</i>	115
<i>The Two Foscari</i>	121
CAIN A MYSTERY	
Introduction to <i>Cain</i>	199
Dedication	205
Preface	207
<i>Cain</i>	213
HEAVEN AND EARTH A MYSTERY	
Introduction to <i>Heaven and Earth</i>	279
<i>Heaven and Earth</i>	85
WERNER OF THE INHERITANCE A TRAGEDY	
Introduction to <i>Werner</i>	325
Note to the Introduction to <i>Werner</i>	329
Dedication	335
Preface	337
<i>Werner</i>	341
<i>Werner</i> [First Draft]	453

THE DEFORMED TRANSFORMED A DRAMA

	PAGE
Introduction to <i>The Deformed Transformed</i>	469
Advertisement	473
<i>The Deformed Transformed</i>	477
Fragment of the Third Part of <i>The Deformed Transformed</i>	531

THE AGE OF BRONZE, OR, CARMEN SECULARE ET ANNUS
HAUD MIRABILIS

Introduction to <i>The Age of Bronze</i>	537
<i>The Age of Bronze</i>	541

THE ISLAND, OR, CHRISTIAN AND HIS COMRADES

Introduction to <i>The Island</i>	581
Advertisement	585
<i>The Island</i> Canto the First	587
Canto the Second	598
Canto the Third	618
Canto the Fourth	626

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

1	LORD BYRON FROM A PORTRAIT IN OILS BY W. E. WEST IN THE POSSESSION OF MR PERCY KENT	<i>From the plate</i>	
2	ASSUR BANI PAL, FROM A SLAB IN THE BRITISH MUSEUM	<i>To face p</i>	12
3	THE LION OF S MARKS		138
4	GOETHE, FROM A DRAWING BY D MACLISE P A IN THE VICTORIA AND ALBERT MUSEUM		8
5	GEORGIANA DUCHESS OF DEVONSHIRE FROM THE MEZZOTINT BY VALENTINE GREEN AFTER SIR J PEYNOLDS, P R A		350
6	MARY WOLLSTONECRAFT SHELLEY FROM A PICTURE BY R POTTERWELL, P R A IN THE NATIONAL PORTRAIT GALLERY (1841)		474

SARDANAPALUS

A TRAGEDY

[*Sardanapale, Tragédie Imitée de Lord Byron, par L. Alvin*, was performed at the Théâtre Royal at Brussels, January 13, 16, 1834

Sardanapalus, a Tragedy, was played for the first time at Drury Lane Theatre, April 10, 1834, and (for the twenty-second time) June 5, 1834. Macready appeared as "Sardanapalus," Miss Phillips as "Zarina," and Miss Ellen Tree as "Myrrha." [In his diary for April 11, 1834 (see *Reminiscences*, 1875, i 414, 415) Macready wrote, "On arriving at my chambers I found a letter without a signature, the seal was the head of Byron, and in the envelope was a folded sheet with merely the words, 'Werner, Nov. 1830 Byron, Ravenna, 1821,' and 'Sardanapalus, April 10th, 1834' Encircling the name of Byron, etc., was a lock of grey hair fastened by a gold thread, which I am sure was Byron's, . it surprised and pleased me"]

Sardanapalus, King of Assyria, was produced at the Princess's Theatre, June 13, 1853, and played till September 2, 1853. Charles Kean appeared as "Sardanapalus," Miss Heath as "Zarina," and Mrs. Charles Kean as "Myrrha."

Sardanapale, Opéra en Trois Actes, par M. Henry Becque, Musique de M. Victorin Joncières, was performed for the first time at the Théâtre Impérial-Lyrique, February 8, 1867.

Lord Byron's Tragedy of Sardanapalus, in four acts, was performed at the Theatre Royal, Manchester, March 31—April 28, 1877. Charles Calvert (the adapter) played "Sardanapalus," Miss Hathaway "Zarina," and Miss Fanny Ensor "Myrrha," and June 26 July 27, 1877, at the Royal Alexandra Theatre, Liverpool. Calvert's adaptation was also performed at Booth's Theatre, New York.]

INTRODUCTION TO *SARDANAPALUS*

BYRON'S passion or infatuation for the regular drama lasted a little over a year *Marino Faliero Sardanapalus* and the *Two Foscari* were the fruits of his self denying ordinance to dramatize like the Greeks 'striking passages of history' (letter to Murray July 14 1821 *Letters* 1901 v 323) The mood was destined to pass but for a while the neophyte was spell bound

Sardanapalus a Tragedy the second and perhaps the most successful of these studies in the poetry of history was begun at Ravenna January 13 1821 'with all deliberate speed, but for a time from laziness or depression of spirits' or perhaps from the counter excitement of the poetry of politics (*Letters* 1901, v 205), that is the revolutionary drama which had begun to run its course a month went by before he had finished the first act (February 15) Three months later (May 28) he announces the completion of the drama the last act having been dashed off in two or three days (*Letters* 1901 v 300)

For the story of Sardanapalus which had excited his interest as a schoolboy Byron consulted the pages of Diodorus Siculus (*Bibliotheca Historica* lib ii pp 78 sq, ed 1604) and possibly to ward off and neutralize the distracting influence of Shakespeare and other barbarian dramatists he turned over the tragedies of Seneca (*Letters* 1901 v 173) It is hardly necessary to remind the modern reader that the Sardanapalus of history is an unverified if not an unverifiable personage Diodorus the Sicilian who was contemporary with Cicero derived his knowledge of Assyrian history from the *Persica* of Ctesias of Cnidos who was private physician at the court of Artaxerxes Mnemon (B C 405-359) and is said to have had access to and to have consulted the Persian authorities (διφθέραι β σὺ καὶ)

The character which Ctesias depicted or invented, an

effeminate debauchee, sunk in luxury and sloth, who at the last was driven to take up arms, and, after a prolonged but ineffectual resistance, avoided capture by suicide, cannot be identified Asurbanipal (Ašur-bāni-apli), the son of Esarhaddon and grandson of Sennacherib, who ascended the throne B C 668, and reigned for about forty years, was, as the cuneiform records and the friezes of his palace testify, a bold hunter and a mighty warrior. He vanquished Tarḫū (Tirhakah) of Ethiopia, and his successor, Urdamañē Ba'al King of Tyre, Yakīnlū King of the island-city of Arvad, Sandāsarmū of Cilicia, Teumman of Elam, and other potentates, suffered defeat at his hands. "The land of Elam," writes the king or his "Historiographer Royal," "through its extent I covered as when a mighty storm approaches, I cut off the head of Teumman, their king. Beyond number I slew his warriors, alive in my hands I took his fighting men, with their corpses, as with thorns and thistles, I filled the vicinity of Susa, their blood I caused to flow in the Eulæus, and I stained its waters like wool." Clearly the Sardanapalus who painted his face and carded purple wool in the *penetralia* of his seraglio does not bear even a traditional resemblance to Ašur-bāni-apli the Conqueror.

All that can be affirmed with any certainty is that within twenty years of the death of Asurbanipal, the Assyrian Empire passed into the hands of the Medes,¹ but there is nothing to show whether the period of decay had already set in before the close of his reign, or under which of his two successors, Ašur-etil-ilāni or Sin-šar-iškun, the final catastrophe (B C 606), took place (*Encyclopædia Biblica*, art "Assyria," art "Asur-bani-pal," by Leonard W. King).

"I have made," writes Byron (May 25, 1821), "Sardanapalus brave though voluptuous (as history represents him), and as amiable as my poor pen could make him." Diodorus, or rather Ctesias, who may have drawn upon personal reminiscences of his patron, Artaxerxes Mnemon (see Plutarch's *Artaxerxes*, *passim*), does not enlarge upon his amiability, and credits him only with the courage of despair. Byron's Sardanapalus, with his sudden transition from

1 [For a description of the fall of Nineveh, see *Nahum* ii 1, *sqq.* — "He that dasheth in pieces is come up before thy face. The shield of his mighty men is made red, the valiant men are in scarlet."

The chariots shall rage in the streets, they shall jostle one against another in the broad ways. They shall seem like torches, they shall run like the lightnings. He shall recount his worthies, they shall stumble in their walk, they shall make haste to the wall thereof, and the defence shall be prepared. The gates of the rivers shall be opened, and the palace shall be dissolved," etc.]

voluptuous abandonment to heroic chivalry his remorseful recognition of the sanctities of wedlock his general good nature his sly insinuating sarcasms" (Moore's Diary, September 30 1821 *Memoirs* iii 28) 'all made out of the carver's brain' resembles *history* as little as *history* resembles the Assyrian record. Fortunately the genius of the poet escaped from the meshes which he had woven round himself, and in spite of himself he was constrained to "beat his music out" regardless of his authorities.

The character of Myrrha, which bears some resemblance to Aspasia, 'a native of Phocæa in Ionia—the favourite mistress of Cyrus' (see Plutarch's *Artaxerxes*, Langhorne's Translation, 1838, p 699) was introduced partly to pacify the Countess Guiccioli, who had quarrelled with him for maintaining that "love was not the loftiest theme for true tragedy," and in part to prove that he was not a slave to his own ideals and could imagine and delineate a woman who was both passionate and high minded. Diodorus (*Bibl Hist* lib iii p 130) records the exploits of Myrina, Queen of the Amazons but it is probable that Byron named his Ionian slave after Mirra who gives her name to Alfieri's tragedy, which brought on a convulsive fit of tears and shuddering when he first saw it played at Bologna in August 1819 (*Letters* 1900 iv 339).

Sardanapalus, a Tragedy was published together with *The Two Foscari a Tragedy* and *Cain a Mystery* December 19 1811.

The three plays were reviewed by Heber in the *Quarterly Review* July 1812 vol xxvii pp 476-514 by Jeffrey in the *Edinburgh Review*, February 1813 vol 36 pp 413-452 in *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* February 1814 vol vi pp 211-217 and in the *Portfolio* (Philadelphia), December 1812 vol xiv pp 487-497.

TO

THE ILLUSTRIOUS GOETHE

A STRANGER

PRESUMES TO OFFER THE HOMAGE

OF A LITERARY VASSAL TO HIS LIEGE LORD

THE FIRST OF EXISTING WRITERS

WHO HAS CREATED

● THE LITERATURE OF HIS OWN COUNTRY

AND ILLUSTRATED THAT OF EUROPE

THE UNWORTHY PRODUCTION

WHICH THE AUTHOR VENTURES TO INSCRIBE TO HIM

IS ENTITLED

SARDANAPALUS¹

1 [A manuscript dedication of *Sardanapalus* was forwarded to him with an obliging inquiry whether it might be prefixed to the tragedy. The German, who at his advanced age was conscious of his own powers and of their effects, could only gratefully and modestly consider this Dedication as the expression of an inexhaustible intellect, deeply feeling and creating its own object. He was by no means dissatisfied when, after long delay, *Sardanapalus* appeared without the Dedication, and was made happy by the possession of a facsimile of it engraved on stone, which he considered a precious memorial — *Lebensverhältnisse zu Byron Werke* 1833 xlvii 221 25 (See too for translation *L f* p 593)]

PREFACE

IN publishing the following Tragedies¹ I have only to repeat that they were not composed with the most remote view to the stage. On the attempt made by the managers in a former instance, the public opinion has been already expressed. With regard to my own private feelings, as it seems that they are to stand for nothing I shall say nothing.

For the historical foundation of the following compositions the reader is referred to the Notes.

The Author has in one instance attempted to preserve, and in the other to approach, the unities conceiving that with any very distant departure from them there may be poetry, but can be no drama. He is aware of the unpopularity of this notion in present English literature, but it is not a system of his own being merely an opinion, which not very long ago was the law of literature throughout the world and is still so in the more civilised parts of it. But nous avons changé tout cela, and are reaping the advantages of the change. The writer is far from conceiving that any thing he can adduce by personal precept or example can at all approach his regular, or even irregular predecessors: he is merely giving a reason why he preferred the more regular formation of a structure however feeble to an entire abandonment of all rules whatsoever. Where he has failed, the failure is in the architect—and not in the art.

¹ [*Sardanapalus* originally appeared in the same volume with *Two Foscari* and *Cain*. The date of publication was December 19 1821.]

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ.



MEN

SARDANAPALUS, *King of Nineveh and Assyria, etc*

ARBACES, *the Mede who ascended to the Throne*

BELESES, *a Chaldean and Soothsayer.*

SALEMENES, *the King's Brother-in-Law*

ALTADA, *an Assyrian Officer of the Palace*

PANIA

ZAMES

SFERO

BALEA

WOMEN

ZARINA, *the Queen*

MYRRHA, *an Ionian female Slave, and the Favourite
Mistress of SARDANAPALUS*

*Women composing the Harem of SARDANAPALUS, Guards,
Attendants, Chaldean Priests, Medes, etc, etc*

SCENE —A Hall in the Royal Palace of Nineveh



SARDANAPALUS¹

ACT I

SCENE I — *A Hall in the Palace*

Salemenes (solus) HE hath wronged his queen but
still he is her lord,
He hath wronged my sister—still he is my brother,

1 [This prince surpassed all his predecessors in effeminacy luxury and cowardice. He never went out of his palace but spent all his time among a company of women dressed and painted like them and employed like them at the distaff. He placed all his happiness and glory in the possession of immense treasures in feasting and rioting and indulging himself in all the most infamous and criminal pleasures. He ordered two verses to be put upon his tomb signifying that he carried away with him all he had eaten and all the pleasures he had enjoyed but left everything else behind him — *an epitaph* says Aristotle *fit for a hero*. Arbaces governor of Media having found means to get into the palace and having with his own eyes seen Sardanapalus in the midst of his infamous seraglio enraged at such a spectacle and not able to endure that so many brave men should be subjected to a prince more soft and effeminate than the women themselves immediately formed a conspiracy against him. Beleses governor of Babylon and several others entered into it. On the first rumour of this revolt the king hid himself in the inmost part of his palace. Being afterwards obliged to take the field with some forces which he had assembled he at first gained three successive victories over the enemy but was afterwards overcome and pursued to the gates of Nineveh wherein he shut himself in hopes the rebels would never be able to take a city so well fortified and stored with provisions for a considerable time. The siege proved indeed of very great length. It had been declared by an ancient oracle that Nineveh could never be taken unless the river became an enemy to the city. These words buoyed up Sardanapalus because he looked upon the thing as impossible. But when he saw that the Tigris by a violent inundation had thrown down twenty stadia (two miles and a half) of the city wall and by that means opened a passage to the enemy he understood the meaning of the oracle and thought himself lost. He resolved however to die in such a manner as according to

The reeking odours of the perfumed trains
 And see the bright gems of the glittering girls
 At once his Chorus and his Council, flash 40
 Along the gallery and amidst the damsels
 As femininely garbed and scarce less female
 The grandson of Semiramis the Man Queen —
 He comes¹ Shall I await him? yes and front him
 And tell him what all good men tell each other,
 Speaking of him and his They come the slaves
 Led by the monarch subject to his slaves.

SCENE II

*Enter SARDANAPALUS effeminately dressed his Head
 crowned with Flowers and his Robe negligently
 flowing attended by a Train of Women and young
 Slaves*

Sar (speaking to some of his attendants) Let the
 pavilion¹ over the Euphrates
 Be garlanded and lit and furnished forth
 For an especial banquet at the hour
 Of midnight we will sup there see nought wanting
 And bid the galley be prepared There is
 A cooling breeze which crisps the broad clear river
 We will embark anon Fair Nymphs who deign

1 *And see the gewgaws of the glittering girls* —[*MIS M erased*]

1 [The words *Queen* (*vide infra* line 83) and *pavilion* occur but it is not an allusion to his Britannic Majesty as you may tremulously (for the admiralty custom) imagine 'Th's you will one day see (if I finish it) as I have made Sardanapalus *drat* (though voluptuous as history presents him) and also as *amiable* as my poor powers could render him So that it could neither be truth nor satire on any living monarch. —Letter to Murray May 5 1821 *Letters* 190 v 299

Byron pretended or perhaps really thought that such a phrase as the Queen's wrongs would be supposed to contain an allusion to the trial of Queen Caroline (August—November 1820) and to the exclusion of her name from the State prayers etc Unquestionably if the play had been put on the stage at this time the pit and gallery would have applauded the sentiment to the echo There was too but one pavilion in 1821 and that was not on the banks of the Euphrates but at Brighton *Qui se excu'e accuse* Byron was not above paltering with his readers in a double sense.]

To share the soft hours of Sardanapalus,
 We'll meet again in that the sweetest hour,
 When we shall gather like the stars above us, 10
 And you will form a heaven as bright as theirs,
 Till then, let each be mistress of her time,
 And thou, my own Ionian Myrrha,¹ choose,
 Wilt thou along with them or me?

Myr My Lord

Sar My Lord! my Life! why answerest thou so coldly?

It is the curse of kings to be so answered.

Rule thy own hours, thou rulest mine say, wouldst thou
 Accompany our guests, or charm away
 The moments from me?

Myr The King's choice is mine

Sar I pray thee say not so my chiefest joy 20

Is to contribute to thine every wish
 I do not dare to breathe my own desire,
 Lest it should clash with thine, for thou art still
 Too prompt to sacrifice thy thoughts for others

Myr I would remain. I have no happiness
 Save in beholding thine, yet

Sar. Yet! what yet?

Thy own sweet will shall be the only barrier
 Which ever rises betwixt thee and me

Myr I think the present is the wonted hour
 Of council, it were better I retire 30

Sal. (*comes forward and says*) The Ionian slave says
 well let her retire.

Sar. Who answers? How now, brother?

Sal. The *Queen's* brother,

And your most faithful vassal, royal Lord

Sar (*addressing his train*) As I have said, let all
 dispose their hours

Till midnight, when again we pray your presence.

[*The court retiring*]

1 "The Ionian name had been still more comprehensive, having included the Achæans and the Bæotians, who, together with those to whom it was afterwards confined, would make nearly the whole of the Greek nation, and among the Orientals it was always the general name for the Greeks"—MILFORD'S *Greece*, 1818, 1 199

(To MYRRHA *who is going*) Myrrha! I thought *thou*
wouldst remain

Myr Great King,
Thou didst not say so

Sar But *thou* lookedst at it
I know each glance of those Ionic eyes,¹¹
Which said thou wouldst not leave me

Myr Sire! your brother
Sal His *Consort's* brother, minion of Ionia! 40
How darest *thou* name *me* and not blush?

Sar Not blush!
Thou hast no more eyes than heart to make her crimson
Like to the dying day on Caucasus
Where sunset tints the snow with rosy shadows
And then reproach her with thine own cold blindness
Which will not see it What! in tears my Myrrha?

Sal Let them flow on, she weeps for more than one
And is herself the cause of bitterer tears

Sar Curséd be he who caused those tears to flow!
Sal Curse not thyself—millions do that already 50

Sar Thou dost forget thee make me not remember
I am a monarch

Sal Would thou couldst!
Myr My sovereign

I pray and thou, too, Prince permit my absence

Sar Since it must be so and this churl has checked
Thy gentle spirit go but recollect
That we must forthwith meet I had rather lose
An empire than thy presence [Exit MYRRHA.

Sal It may be
Thou wilt lose both—and both for ever!

Sar Brother!
I can at least command myself who listen
To language such as this yet urge me not 60
Beyond my easy nature

Sal 'Tis beyond
That easy—far too easy—idle nature
Which I would urge thee O that I could rouse thee!

1 To Byblis — —[MS M]

11 I know each glance of those deep Greek souled eyes —[MS M erased]

Though 'twere against myself

Sar

By the god Baal !

The man would make me tyrant.

Sal

So thou art.

Think'st thou there is no tyranny but that
Of blood and chains ? The despotism of vice,
The weakness and the wickedness of luxury,
The negligence, the apathy, the evils
Of sensual sloth produce ten thousand tyrants, 70
Whose delegated cruelty surpasses
The worst acts of one energetic master,
However harsh and hard in his own bearing.
The false and fond examples of thy lusts
Corrupt no less than they oppress, and sap
In the same moment all thy pageant power
And those who should sustain it, so that whether
A foreign foe invade, or civil broil
Distract within, both will alike prove fatal
The first thy subjects have no heart to conquer, 80
The last they rather would assist than vanquish.

Sar Why, what makes thee the mouth-piece of the
people ?

Sal Forgiveness of the Queen, my sister wrongs,
A natural love unto my infant nephews,
Faith to the King, a faith he may need shortly,
In more than words, respect for Nimrod's line,
Also, another thing thou knowest not.

Sar What's that ?

Sal

To thee an unknown word

Sar.

Yet speak it,

I love to learn

Sal

Virtue

Sar

Not know the word !

Never was word yet rung so in my ears 90
Worse than the rabble's shout, or splitting trumpet
I've heard thy sister talk of nothing else

Sal To change the irksome theme, then, hear of vice.

Sar From whom ?

Sal.

Even from the winds, if thou couldst listen
Unto the echoes of the Nation's voice.

Sar. Come, I'm indulgent, as thou knowest, patient,

As thou hast often proved—speak out, what moves thee?

Sal Thy peril

Sar Say on

Sal Thus, then all the nations
For they are many, whom thy father left

In heritage are loud in wrath against thee 100

Sar Gainst me! / / What would the slaves?

Sal A king

Sar And what

Am I then?

Sal In their eyes a nothing, but
In mine a man who might be something still

Sar The railing drunkards! why what would they
have?

Have they not peace and plenty?

Sal Of the first
More than is glorious, of the last, far less
Than the king recks of

Sar Whose then is the crime,
But the false satraps who provide no better?

Sal And somewhat in the Monarch who ne'er looks
Beyond his palace walls, or if he stirs 110

Beyond them, 'tis but to some mountain palace,
Till summer heats wear down O glorious Baal!

Who built up this vast empire, and wert made

A God or at the least shonest like a God

Through the long centuries of thy renown

This, thy presumed descendant ne'er beheld

As king the kingdoms thou didst leave as hero

Won with thy blood and toil, and time and peril!

For what? to furnish imposts for a revel

Or multiplied extortions for a minion 120

Sar I understand thee—thou wouldst have me go
Forth as a conqueror By all the stars

Which the Chaldeans read—the restless slaves!

Deserve that I should curse them with their wishes,

And lead them forth to glory

Sal Wherefore not?
Semiramis—a woman only—led

¹ — I have a mind
To curse the restless slaves with their own wishes —[MS M erased]

These our Assyrians to the solar shores
Of Ganges

Sar 'Tis most true. And *how* returned?

Sal Why, like a *man*—a hero; baffled, but
Not vanquished. With but twenty guards, she made
Good her retreat to Bactria

Sar. And how many 131
Left she behind in India to the vultures?

Sal. Our annals say not.

Sar. Then I will say for them
That she had better woven within her palace
Some twenty garments, than with twenty guards
Have fled to Bactria, leaving to the ravens,
And wolves, and men—the fiercer of the three,
Her myriads of fond subjects Is *this* Glory?
Then let me live in ignominy ever

Sal All warlike spirits have not the same fate. 140
Semiramis, the glorious parent of
A hundred kings, although she failed in India,
Brought Persia Media Bactria—to the realm
Which she once swayed—and thou *mightst* sway *

Sar. I *sway* them—
She but subdued them.

Sal. It may be ere long
That they will need her sword more than your sceptre.

Sar There was a certain Bacchus, was there not?
I've heard my Greek girls speak of such they say
He was a God, that is, a Grecian god,
An idol foreign to Assyria's worship, 150
Who conquered this same golden realm of Ind
Thou prat'st of, where Semiramis was vanquished

Sal. I have heard of such a man, and thou perceiv'st
That he is deemed a God for what he did

Sar And in his godship I will honour him
Not much as man What, ho! my cupbearer!

Sal What means the King?

Sar To worship your new God
And ancient conqueror Some wine, I say.

Enter Cupbearer

Sar (addressing the Cupbearer) Bring me the golden
goblet thick with gems
Which bears the name of Nimrod's chalice Hence 160
Fill full and bear it quickly [*Exit Cupbearer*

Sal Is this moment
A fitting one for the resumption of
Thy yet unslept off revels?

Re-enter Cupbearer, with wine

Sar (taking the cup from him) Noble kinsman,
If these barbarian Greeks of the far shores
And skirts of these our realms lie not this Bacchus
Conquered the whole of India¹ did he not?

Sal He did and thence was deemed a Deity²

Sar Not so — of all his conquests a few columns³
Which may be his and might be mine if I
Thought them worth purchase and conveyance are 170
The landmarks of the seas of gore he shed
The realms he wasted, and the hearts he broke
But here—here in this goblet is his title
To immortality—the immortal grape
From which he first expressed the soul and gave
To gladden that of man as some atonement
For the victorious mischiefs he had done
Had it not been for this he would have been
A mortal still in name as in his grave,
And like my ancestor Semiramis 180
A sort of semi glorious human monster
Here's that which deified him—let it now
Humanise thee my surly chiding brother

¹ *He did and thence was deemed a God in story*—[*MS M erased*]

¹ [For the occupation of India by Dionysus see *Diod Siculi Hist lib ii pag 87 c*]

² [Strabo (*Rerum Geog lib iii 1807 p 235*) throws some doubt on the existence of these columns which he suggests were islands or pillar rocks According to Plutarch (*Langhorne's Translation 1838 p 490*) Alexander built great altars on the banks of the Ganges on which the native kings were wont to offer sacrifices in the Grecian manner Hence perhaps the legend of the columns erected by Dionysus]

Pledge me to the Greek God !

Sal. For all thy realms
I would not so blaspheme our country's creed

Sar That is to say, thou thinkest him a hero,
That he shed blood by oceans, and no God,
Because he turned a fruit to an enchantment,
Which cheers the sad, revives the old, inspires
The young, makes Weariness forget his toil, 190
And Fear her danger, opens a new world
When this, the present, palls. Well, then I pledge thee
And *him* as a true man, who did his utmost
In good or evil to surprise mankind [*Drinks.*

Sal. Wilt thou resume a revel at this hour?

Sar And if I did, 'twere better than a trophy,
Being bought without a tear But that is not
My present purpose since thou wilt not pledge me,
Continue what thou pleasest.
(*To the Cupbearer*) Boy, retire

[*Exit Cupbearer*

Sal I would but have recalled thee from thy dream,
Better by me awakened than rebellion 201

Sar Who should rebel? or why? what cause? pretext?
I am the lawful King, descended from
A race of Kings who knew no predecessors
What have I done to thee, or to the people,
That thou shouldst rail, or they rise up against me?

Sal Of what thou hast done to me, I speak not

Sar. But
Thou think'st that I have wronged the Queen is't not so?

Sal Think! Thou hast wronged her!

Sar. Patience, Prince, and hear me
She has all power and splendour of her station, 210
Respect, the tutelage of Assyria's heirs,
The homage and the appanage of sovereignty
I married her as monarchs wed—for state,
And loved her as most husbands love their wives
If she or thou supposedst I could link me
Like a Chaldean peasant to his mate,
Ye knew nor me—nor monarchs—nor mankind

Sal I pray thee, change the theme my blood disdains
Complaint, and Salemenes' sister seeks not

Reluctant love even from Assyria's lord ! 220
 Nor would she deign to accept divided passion
 With foreign strumpets and Ionian slaves
 The Queen is silent

Sar And why not her brother ?

Sal I only echo thee the voice of empires,
 Which he who long neglects not long will govern

Sar The ungrateful and ungracious slaves ! they
 murmur

Because I have not shed their blood nor led them
 To dry into the desert's dust by myriads
 Or whiten with their bones the banks of Ganges ,
 Nor decimated them with savage laws 230
 Nor sweated them to build up Pyramids,
 Or Babylonian walls

Sal Yet these are trophies
 More worthy of a people and their prince
 Than songs and lutes and feasts, and concubines
 And lavished treasures and contemn'd virtues

Sar Or for my trophies I have founded cities
 There's Tarsus and Anchialus both built
 In one day—what could that blood loving beldame
 My martial grandam, chaste Semiramis
 Do more, except destroy them ?

Sal 'Tis most true 240
 I own thy merit in those founded cities
 Built for a whim recorded with a verse
 Which shames both them and thee to coming ages

Sar Shame me ! By Baal the cities though well built
 Are not more goodly than the verse ! Say what
 Thou wilt gainst me my mode of life or rule
 But nothing gainst the truth of that brief record
 Why those few lines contain the history
 Of all things human hear—'Sardanapalus
 The king and son of Anacyndaraxes, 250
 In one day built Anchialus and Tarsus
 Eat drink, and love the rest's not worth a fillip ¹

¹ For this expedition he took only a small chosen body of the phalanx but all his light troops. In the first day's march he reached Anchialus a town said to have been founded by the king of Assyria. Sardanapalus. The fortifications in their magnitude and extent still

Sal. A worthy moral, and a wise inscription,
For a king to put up before his subjects !

in Arrian's time, bore the character of greatness, which the Assyrians appear singularly to have affected in works of the kind. A monument representing Sardanapalus was found there, warranted by an inscription in Assyrian characters, of course in the old Assyrian language, which the Greeks, whether well or ill, interpreted thus 'Sardanapalus, son of Anacyndaraxes, in one day founded Anchialus and Tarsus. Eat, drink, play, all other human joys are not worth a filip.' Supposing this version nearly exact (for Arrian says it was not quite so), whether the purpose has not been to invite to civil order a people disposed to turbulence, rather than to recommend immoderate luxury, may perhaps reasonably be questioned. What, indeed, could be the object of a king of Assyria in founding such towns in a country so distant from his capital, and so divided from it by an immense extent of sandy deserts and lofty mountains, and, still more, how the inhabitants could be at once in circumstances to abandon themselves to the intemperate joys which their prince has been supposed to have recommended, is not obvious. But it may deserve observation that, in that line of coast, the southern of Lesser Asia, ruins of cities, evidently of an age after Alexander, yet barely named in history, at this day astonish the adventurous traveller by their magnificence and elegance amid the desolation which, under a singularly barbarian government, has for so many centuries been daily spreading in the finest countries of the globe. Whether more from soil and climate, or from opportunities for commerce, extraordinary means must have been found for communities to flourish there, whence it may seem that the measures of Sardanapalus were directed by juster views than have been commonly ascribed to him. But that monarch having been the last of a dynasty ended by a revolution, obloquy on his memory would follow of course from the policy of his successors and their partisans. The inconsistency of traditions concerning Sardanapalus is striking in Diodorus's account of him.—MITFORD'S *Greece*, 1820, v. 311-313, and *note* 1.

[The story of the sepulchral monument with its cynical inscription rests on the authority of Aristobulus, who served under Alexander, and wrote his history. The passage is quoted by Strabo (lib. vii. ed. 1808, p. 958), and as follows by Athenæus (lib. vii. cap. 40) in the *Deipnosophistæ*. "And Aristobulus says, 'In Anchiale, which was built by Sardanapalus, did Alexander, when he was on his expedition against the Persians, pitch his camp. And at no great distance was the monument of Sardanapalus, on which there is a marble figure putting together the fingers of its right hand, as if it were giving a filip. And there was on it the following inscription in Assyrian characters —

'Sardanapalus
The king, and son of Anacyndaraxes,
In one day built Anchiale and Tarsus
Eat, drink, and love, the rest's not worth e'en this'

By '*this*' meaning the filip he was giving with his fingers."

"We may conjecture," says Canon Rawlinson, "that the monument was in reality a stele containing the king [Sennacherib] in an arched frame, with the right hand raised above the left, which is the ordinary attitude, and an inscription commemorating the occasion of its erection" [the conquest of Cilicia and settlement of Tarsus]—*The Five Great Monarchies etc.*, 1871, ii. 216.]

Sar Oh, thou wouldst have me doubtless set up
edicts—

‘ Obey the king—contribute to his treasure—
Recruit his phalanx—spill your blood at bidding—
Fall down and worship or get up and toil
Or thus—“Sardanapalus on this spot
Slew fifty thousand of his enemies 260

These are their sepulchres and this his trophy
I leave such things to conquerors enough
For me if I can make my subjects feel
The weight of human misery less and glide
Ungroaning to the tomb I take no license
Which I deny to them We all are men

Sal Thy Sires have been revered as Gods—

Sar In dust

And death where they are neither Gods nor men
Talk not of such to me! the worms are Gods ¹
At least they banqueted upon your Gods 270
And died for lack of farther nutriment
Those Gods were merely men, look to their issue—
I feel a thousand mortal things about me
But nothing godlike,—unless it may be
The thing which you condemn a disposition
To love and to be merciful to pardon
The follies of my species and (that’s human)
To be indulgent to my own

Sal Alas!

The doom of Nineveh is sealed —Woe—woe
To the unrivalled city ¹

Sar What dost dread? 80

Sal Thou art guarded by thy foes in a few hours
The tempest may break out which overwhelms thee
And thine and mine, and in another day
What *is* shall be the past of Belus’ race

Sar What must we dread?

Sal Ambitious treachery

Which has environed thee with snares but yet
There is resource empower me with thy signet

¹ [Compare Your worm is your only emperor for diet & e’at all
creatures else to f’it us and we f’at oursel’es for maggots —*Har let*
act iv sc 3 lines 21 23]

To quell the machinations, and I lay
The heads of thy chief foes before thy feet.

Sar The heads—how many?

Sal. Must I stay to number
When even thine own's in peril? Let me go, 291
Give me thy signet trust me with the rest

Sar I will trust no man with unlimited lives.
When we take those from others, we nor know
What we have taken, nor the thing we give.

Sal. Wouldst thou not take their lives who seek for
thine?

Sar That's a hard question But I answer, Yes
Cannot the thing be done without? Who are they
Whom thou suspectest? Let them be arrested.

Sal I would thou wouldst not ask me, the next
moment 300

Will send my answer through thy babbling troop
Of paramours, and thence fly o'er the palace,
Even to the city, and so baffle all
Trust me.

Sar Thou knowest I have done so ever, ,
Take thou the signet [*Gives the signet*

Sal I have one more request

Sar Name it

Sal That thou this night forbear the banquet
In the pavilion over the Euphrates

Sar. Forbear the banquet! Not for all the plotters
That ever shook a kingdom! Let them come,
And do their worst I shall not blench for them, 310
Nor rise the sooner, nor forbear the goblet,
Nor crown me with a single rose the less,
Nor lose one joyous hour I fear them not

Sal But thou wouldst arm thee, wouldst thou not, if
needful?

Sar Perhaps. I have the goodliest armour, and
A sword of such a temper, and a bow,
And javelin, which might furnish Nimrod forth
A little heavy, but yet not unwieldy.
And now I think on't, 'tis long since I've used them,
Even in the chase. Hast ever seen them, brother? 320

Sal Is this a time for such fantastic trifling?

If need be, wilt thou wear them ?

Sar Will I not ?

Oh ! if it must be so, and these rash slaves
Will not be ruled with less I'll use the sword
Till they shall wish it turned into a distaff

Sal They say thy Sceptre's turned to that already

Sar That's false ! but let them say so the old Greeks
Of whom our captives often sing related
The same of their chief hero Hercules
Because he loved a Lydian queen thou seest 330
The populace of all the nations seize
Each calumny they can to sink their sovereigns

Sal They did not speak thus of thy fathers

Sar No

They dared not They were kept to toil and combat
And never changed their chains but for their armour
Now they have peace and pastime, and the license
To revel and to rail, it irks me not
I would not give the smile of one fair girl
For all the popular breath¹ that e'er divided
A name from nothing What are the rank tongues² 340
Of this vile herd grown insolent with feeding
That I should prize their noisy praise or dread
Their noisome clamour ?

Sal You have said they are men

As such their hearts are something

Sar So my dogs are,

And better, as more faithful —but proceed,
Thou hast my signet —since they are tumultuous
Let them be tempered yet not roughly, till
Necessity enforce it I hate all pain
Given or received, we have enough within us
The meanest vassal as the loftiest monarch 350
Not to add to each other's natural burthen

¹ [Compare—

The fickle reek of popular breath

Childe Harold Canto IV stanza clxxi line 2]

² [Compare—

I have not flattered its rank breath

Childe Harold Canto III stanza cx line

Compare too Shakespeare *Coriolanus* act III sc. 1 lines 66 67]

Of mortal misery, but rather lessen,
By mild reciprocal alleviation,
The fatal penalties imposed on life
But this they know not, or they will not know.
I have, by Baal¹ done all I could to soothe them
I made no wars, I added no new imposts,
I interfered not with their civic lives,
I let them pass their days as best might suit them,
Passing my own as suited me

Thou stopp'st 360

Short of the duties of a king, and therefore
They say thou art unfit to be a monarch

Sar. They lie. Unhappily, I am unfit
 To be aught save a monarch, else for me
 The meanest Mede might be the king instead.

Sal There is one Mede, at least, who seeks to be so

Sar What mean'st thou 'tis thy secret, thou
desirest

Few questions, and I'm not of curious nature

Take the fit steps, and, since necessity

Requires, I sanction and support thee Ne'er 370

Was man who more desired to rule in peace

The peaceful only if they rouse me, better

They had conjured up stern Nimrod from his ashes,

"The Mighty Hunter!" I will turn these realms

To one wide desert chase of brutes, who *were*,

But *would* no more, by their own choice, be human

What they have found me, they belie, *that which*

They yet may find me—shall defy their wish

To speak it woise , and let them thank themselves

Sal Then thou at last canst feel?

Sar Feel ! who feels not

Ingratitude? ¹

Sal I will not pause to answer 381

With words, but deeds Keep thou awake that energy
Which sleeps at times, but is not dead within thee,

1 ["Rode Winter's wind somewhat more unkind than ingratitude itself, though Shakespeare says otherwise. At least, I am so much more accustomed to meet with ingratitude than the north wind, that I thought the latter the sharper of the two. I had met with both in the course of the twenty-four hours, so could judge"—*Extracts from a Diary*, January 19, 1821, *Letters*, 1901, v 177]

And thou mayst yet be glorious in thy reign
 As powerful in thy realm Farewell ! [*Exit SALEMNES*
Sar (solus) Farewell !

He's gone, and on his finger bears my signet,
 Which is to him a sceptre He is stern
 As I am heedless, and the slaves deserve
 To feel a master What may be the danger
 I know not he hath found it, let him quell it 390
 Must I consume my life—this little life—
 In guarding against all may make it less ?
 It is not worth so much ! It were to die
 Before my hour, to live in dread of death
 Tracing revolt, suspecting all about me
 Because they are near, and all who are remote
 Because they are far But if it should be so—
 If they should sweep me off from Earth and Empire,
 Why what is Earth or Empire of the Earth ?
 I have loved, and lived and multiplied my image 400
 To die is no less natural than those
 Acts of this clay 'Tis true I have not shed
 Blood as I might have done in oceans till
 My name became the synonyme of Death—
 A terror and a trophy But for this
 I feel no penitence, my life is love
 If I must shed blood, it shall be by force
 Till now no drop from an Assyrian vein
 Hath flowed for me, nor hath the smallest coin
 Of Nineveh's vast treasures e'er been lavished 410
 On objects which could cost her sons a tear
 If then they hate me 'tis because I hate not
 If they rebel 'tis because I oppress not
 Oh men ! ye must be ruled with scythes not sceptres
 And mowed down like the grass else all we reap
 Is rank abundance, and a rotten harvest
 Of discontents infecting the fair soil
 Making a desert of fertility —
 I'll think no more Within there ho !

Enter an ATTENDANT

Sar Slave, tell
 The Ionian Myrrha we would crave her presence 40
Attend King she is here

MYRRHA *enters*.

Sar (*apart to Attendant*). Away!
 (*Addressing MYRRHA*) Beautiful being!
 Thou dost almost anticipate my heart,
 It throbbed for thee, and here thou comest. let me
 Deem that some unknown influence, some sweet oracle,
 Communicates between us, though unseen,
 In absence, and attracts us to each other

Myr. There doth.

Sar I know there doth, but not its name
 What is it?

Myr In my native land a God,
 And in my heart a feeling like a God's,
 Exalted, yet I own 'tis only mortal, 430
 For what I feel is humble, and yet happy
 That is, it would be happy, but [*MYRRHA pauses*

Sar There comes
 For ever something between us and what
 We deem our happiness let me remove
 The barrier which that hesitating accent
 Proclaims to thine, and mine is sealed

Myr. My Lord!

Sar My Lord my King Sue Sovereign, thus it
 is

For ever thus, addressed with awe I ne'er
 Can see a smile, unless in some broad banquet's
 Intoxicating glare, when the buffoons 440
 Have gorged themselves up to equality,
 Or I have quaffed me down to their abasement.
 Myrrha, I can hear all these things, these names,
 Lord King Sire Monarch nay, time was I prized
 them,

That is, I suffered them—from slaves and nobles,
 But when they falter from the lips I love,
 The lips which have been pressed to mine, a chill
 Comes o'er my heart, a cold sense of the falsehood
 Of this my station, which represses feeling
 In those for whom I have felt most, and makes me 450
 Wish that I could lay down the dull tiara,
 And share a cottage on the Caucasus

With thee—and wear no crowns but those of flowers

Myr Would that we could !

Sar And dost *thou* feel this ?—Why ?

Myr Then thou wouldst know what thou canst never
know

Sar And that is

Myr The true value of a heart ,

At least, a woman's

Sar I have proved a thousand—

A thousand and a thousand

Myr Hearts ?

Sar I think so

Myr Not one ! the time may come thou may'st.

Sar It will

Hear Myrrha , Salemenes has declared—

460

Or why or how he hath divined it Belus,

Who founded our great realm, knows more than I—

But Salemenes hath declared my throne

In peril

Myr He did well

Sar And say st *thou* so ?

Thou whom he spurned so harshly, and now dared¹

Drive from our presence with his savage jeers

And made thee weep and blush ?

Myr I should do both

More frequently and he did well to call me

Back to my duty But thou spakest of peril

Peril to thee

Sar Aye from dark plots and snares 470

From Medes—and discontented troops and nations

I know not what—a labyrinth of things—

A maze of muttered threats and mysteries

Thou know st the man—it is his usual custom

But he is honest Come we'll think no more on t—

But of the midnight festival

Myr 'Tis time

To think of aught save festivals Thou hast not

Spurned his sage cautions ?

Sar What ?—and dost thou fear ?

¹ — and *even* dared

Profane our presence with his savage jeers —[MS M]

Myr. Fear! I'm a Greek, and how should I fear death?

A slave, and wherefore should I dread my freedom? 480

Sar. Then wherefore dost thou turn so pale?

Myr. I love.

Sar. And do not I? I love thee far far more
Than either the brief life or the wide realm,

Which, it may be, are menaced,—yet I blench not

Myr. That means thou lovest nor thyself nor me,
For he who loves another loves himself,
Even for that other's sake. This is too rash
Kingdoms and lives are not to be so lost

Sar. Lost! why, who is the aspiring chief who dared
Assume to win them?

Myr. Who is he should dread 490
To try so much? When he who is their ruler
Forgets himself—will they remember him?

Sar. Myrrha!

Myr. Frown not upon me you have smiled
Too often on me not to make those frowns
Bitterer to bear than any punishment
Which they may augur. King, I am your subject!
Master, I am your slave! Man, I have loved you!
Loved you, I know not by what fatal weakness,
Although a Greek, and born a foe to monarchs
A slave, and hating fetters—an Ionian, 500
And, therefore, when I love a stranger, more
Degraded by that passion than by chains!
Still I have loved you If that love were strong
Enough to overcome all former nature,
Shall it not claim the privilege to save you?

Sar. Save me, my beauty! Thou art very fair,
And what I seek of thee is love not safety

Myr. And without love where dwells security?

Sar. I speak of woman's love

Myr. The very first
Of human life must spring from woman's breast, 510
Your first small words are taught you from her lips,
Your first tears quenched by her, and your last sighs
Too often breathed out in a woman's hearing,
When men have shrunk from the ignoble care

Of watching the last hour of him who led them

Sar My eloquent Ionian ! thou speak'st music
The very chorus of the tragic song

I have heard thee talk of as the favourite pastime
Of thy far father land Nay weep not—calm thee

Myr I weep not —But I pray thee do not speak 520
About my fathers or their land

Sar

Yet oft

Thou speakest of them

Myr True—true constant thought
Will overflow in words unconsciously ,

But when another speaks of Greeks it wounds me

Sar Well then how wouldst thou *save* me, as thou
saidst ?

Myr By teaching thee to *save* thyself, and not
Thyself alone but these vast realms, from all

The rage of the worst war—the war of brethren

Sar Why child I loathe all war, and warriors
I live in peace and pleasure what can man 530
Do more ?

Myr Alas ! my Lord with common men
There needs too oft the show of war to keep

The substance of sweet peace, and for a king

'Tis sometimes better to be feared than loved

Sar And I have never sought but for the last

Myr And now art neither

Sar Dost *thou* say so Myrrha ?

Myr I speak of civic popular love *self* love

Which means that men are kept in awe and law

Yet not oppressed—at least they must not think so

Or if they think so deem it necessary 540

To ward off worse oppression their own passions

A king of feasts and flowers and wine, and revel

And love, and mirth, was never king of Glory

Sar Glory ! what's that ?

Myr Ask of the Gods thy fathers

Sar They cannot answer when the priests speak for
them

'Tis for some small addition to the temple

Myr Look to the annals of thine Empire's founders

Sar They are so blotted over with blood, I cannot

But what wouldst have? the Empire *has been* founded
I cannot go on multiplying empires. 550

Mjr. Preserve thine own.

Sar At least, I will enjoy it.

Come, Myrrha, let us go on to the Euphrates
The hour invites, the galley is prepared,
And the pavilion, decked for our return,
In fit adornment for the evening banquet,
Shall blaze with beauty and with light, until
It seems unto the stars which are above us
Itself an opposite star, and we will sit
Crowned with fresh flowers like

Mjr

Victims

Sar

No, like sovereigns,

The Shepherd Kings of patriarchal times, 560
Who knew no brighter gems than summer wreaths,¹
And none but tearless triumphs. Let us on

Enter PANIA

Pan. May the King live for ever !

Sar

Not an hour

Longer than he can love How my soul hates
This language, which makes life itself a lie,
Flattering dust with eternity.² Well, Pania !
Be brief

Pan. I am charged by Salemenes to
Reiterate his prayer unto the King,
That for this day, at least, he will not quit
The palace when the General returns, 570
He will adduce such reasons as will warrant
His daring, and perhaps obtain the pardon
Of his presumption

Sar

What ! am I then cooped ?

Already captive? can I not even breathe
The breath of heaven? Tell prince Salemenes,
Were all Assyria raging round the walls
In mutinous myriads, I would still go forth

Pan. I must obey, and yet

¹ *Who loved no gems so well as those of nature* —[MS M]

² *Wishing eternity to dust* —[MS M]

Myr Oh Monarch, listen —
 How many a day and moon thou hast reclined
 Within these palace walls in silken dalliance, 580
 And never shown thee to thy people's longing,
 Leaving thy subjects eyes ungratified
 The satraps uncontrolled the Gods unworshipped
 And all things in the anarchy of sloth
 Till all save evil, slumbered through the realm !
 And wilt thou not now tarry for a day —
 A day which may redeem thee? Wilt thou not
 Yield to the few still faithful a few hours,
 For them for thee, for thy past fathers race,
 And for thy sons inheritance ?

Pan 'Tis true ! 590
 From the deep urgency with which the Prince
 Despatched me to your sacred presence I
 Must dare to add my feeble voice to that
 Which now has spoken

Sar No, it must not be.

Myr For the sake of thy realm !

Sar Away !

Pan For that
 Of all thy faithful subjects, who will rally
 Round thee and thine

Sar These are mere fantasies
 There is no peril — 'tis a sullen scheme
 Of Salemenes, to approve his zeal
 And show himself more necessary to us 600

Myr By all that's good and glorious take this counsel

Sar Business to-morrow

Myr Aye—or death to-night

Sar Why let it come then unexpectedly
 Midst joy and gentleness and mirth and love
 So let me fall like the plucked rose — far better
 Thus than be withered

Myr Then thou wilt not yield,
 Even for the sake of all that ever stirred
 A monarch into action to forego
 A trifling revel

Sar No

Myr Then yield for mine

For my sake !

Sar Thine, my Myrrha !

Myr 'Tis the first 610

Boon which I ever asked Assyria's king

Sar That's true, and, wcr't my kingdom, must be granted

Well, for thy sake, I yield me Pania, hence !

Thou hear'st me

Pan And obey. [Exit PANIA.

Sar I marvel at thee

What is thy motive, Myrrha, thus to urge me ?

Myr Thy safety, and the certainty that nought

Could urge the Prince thy kinsman to require

Thus much from thee, but some impending danger

Sar And if I do not dread it, why shouldst thou ?

Myr Because *thou* dost not fear, I fear for *thee* 620

Sar To-morrow thou wilt smile at these vain fancies

Myr If the worst come, I shall be where none weep,

And that is better than the power to smile

And thou ?

Sar I shall be King, as heretofore.

Myr Where ?

Sar With Baal, Nimrod, and Semiramis,

Sole in Assyria, or with them elsewhere

Fate made me what I am may make me nothing

But either that or nothing must I be

I will not live degraded

Myr Hadst thou felt

Thus always, none would ever dare degrade thee 630

Sar And who will do so now ?

Myr Dost thou suspect none ?

Sar Suspect !—that's a spy's office Oh ! we lose

Ten thousand precious moments in vain words,

And vainer fears Within there ! ye slaves, deck

The Hall of Nimrod for the evening revel,

If I must make a prison of our palace,

At least we'll wear our fetters jocundly,

If the Euphrates be forbid us, and

The summer-dwelling on its beauteous border,

Here we are still unmenaced Ho ! within there ! 640

[Exit SARDANAPALUS

Myr (solus) Why do I love this man? My country's daughters
Love none but heroes But I have no country !
The slave hath lost all save her bonds I love him ,
And that's the heaviest link of the long chain—
To love whom we esteem not Be it so
The hour is coming when he'll need all love,
And find none To fall from him now were baser
Than to have stabbed him on his throne when highest
Would have been noble in my country's creed
I was not made for either Could I save him, 650
I should not love *him* better, but myself,
And I have need of the last for I have fallen
In my own thoughts by loving this soft stranger
And yet, methinks I love him more perceiving,
That he is hated of his own barbarians,
The natural foes of all the blood of Greece
Could I but wake a single thought like those
Which even the Phrygians felt when battling long
Twixt Ilion and the sea, within his heart,
He would tread down the barbarous crowds and triumph
He loves me and I love him, the slave loves 661
Her master and would free him from his vices
If not I have a means of freedom still
And if I cannot teach him how to reign
May show him how alone a King can leave
His throne I must not lose him from my sight [*Exit*

ACT II

SCENE I — *The Portal of the same Hall of the Palace*

Beleses (solus) The Sun goes down methinks he sets
more slowly,
Taking his last look of Assyria's Empire
How red he glares amongst those deepening clouds
Like the blood he predicts If not in vain,
Thou Sun that sinkest, and ye stars which rise

I have outwatched ye, reading ray by ray
 The edicts of your orbs, which make Time tremble¹
 For what he brings the nations, 'tis the furthest
 Hour of Assyria's years And yet how calm!
 An earthquake should announce so great a fall 10
 A summer's sun discloses it. Yon disk,
 To the star-read Chaldean, bears upon
 Its everlasting page the end of what
 Seemed everlasting, but oh! thou true Sun!
 The burning oracle of all that live,
 As fountain of all life, and symbol of
 Him who bestows it, wherefore dost thou limit
 Thy lore unto calamity? Why not
 Unfold the rise of days more worthy thine
 All-glorious burst from ocean? why not dart 20
 A beam of hope athwart the future years,
 As of wrath to its days? Hear me! oh, hear me!
 I am thy worshipper, thy priest, thy servant
 I have gazed on thee at thy rise and fall,
 And bowed my head beneath thy mid-day beams,
 When my eye dared not meet thee I have watch'd
 For thee, and after thee, and prayed to thee,
 And sacrificed to thee, and read, and feared thee,
 And asked of thee, and thou hast answered—but
 Only to thus much while I speak, he sinks 30
 Is gone—and leaves his beauty, not his knowledge,
 To the delighted West, which levels in
 Its hues of dying glory Yet what is
 Death, so it be but glorious? 'Tis a sunset.
 And mortals may be happy to resemble
 The Gods but in decay

Enter ARBACES by an inner door

Arb

Beleses, why
 So wrapt in thy devotions? Dost thou stand
 Gazing to trace thy disappearing God
 Into some realm of undiscovered day?
 Our business is with night 'tis come

¹ *Each twinkle unto which Time trembles, and Nations grow nothing* —[MS M erased]

Bel But not 40
Gone

Arb Let it roll on—we are ready

Bel Yes
Would it were over !

Arb Does the prophet doubt,
To whom the very stars shine Victory ?

Bel I do not doubt of Victory—but the Victor

Arb Well, let thy science settle that Meantime
I have prepared as many glittering spears
As will out sparkle our allies—your planets
There is no more to thwart us The she king,
That less than woman, is even now upon
The waters with his female mates The order 50
Is issued for the feast in the pavilion
The first cup which he drains will be the last
Quaffed by the line of Nimrod

Bel 'Twas a brave one

Arb And is a weak one—tis worn out—we'll mend it

Bel Art sure of that ?

Arb Its founder was a hunter—
I am a soldier—what is there to fear ?

Bel The soldier

Arb And the priest it may be but
If you thought thus or think, why not retain
Your king of concubines ? why stir me up ?
Why spur me to this enterprise ? your own 60
No less than mine ?

Bel Look to the sky !

Arb I look

Bel What seest thou ?

Arb A fair summer's twilight, and
The gathering of the stars

Bel And midst them mark
Yon earliest and the brightest, which so quivers
As it would quit its place in the blue ether

Arb Well ?

Bel 'Tis thy natal ruler—thy birth planet

Arb (*touching his scabbard*) My star is in this scabbard
when it shines
It shall out dazzle comets Let us think

Of what is to be done to justify
 Thy planets and their portents When we conquer, 70
 They shall have temples—aye, and priests—and thou
 Shalt be the pontiff of—what Gods thou wilt,
 For I observe that they are ever just,
 And own the bravest for the most devout.

Bel Aye, and the most devout for brave—thou hast not
 Seen me turn back from battle

Arb No, I own thee
 As firm in fight as Babylon's captain,
 As skilful in Chaldea's worship now,
 Will it but please thee to forget the priest.
 And be the warrior?

Bel Why not both?

Arb The better, 80
 And yet it almost shames me, we shall have
 So little to effect This woman's warfare
 Degrades the very conqueror To have plucked
 A bold and bloody despot from his throne,
 And grappled with him, clashing steel with steel,
 That were heroic or to win or fall,
 But to upraise my sword against this silkworm,¹
 And hear him whine, it may be

Bel Do not deem it
 He has that in him which may make you strife yet,
 And were he all you think, his guards are hardy, 90
 And headed by the cool, stern Salemenes

Arb They'll not resist

Bel Why not? they are soldiers
Arb True,

And therefore need a soldier to command them

Bel That Salemenes is

Arb But not then King
 Besides, he hates the effeminate thing that governs,
 For the Queen's sake, his sister Mark you not
 He keeps aloof from all the revels?

Bel But
 Not from the council there he is ever constant.

Arb And ever thwarted what would you have more

¹ [Compare "these swoln silkworms," *Marino Faliero*, act II sc
 line 115, *Poetical Works*, 1901, IV 386, note 4]

To make a rebel out of? A fool reigning 100
 His blood dishonoured, and himself disdained
 Why it is *his* revenge we work for

Bel Could
 He but be brought to think so this I doubt of

Arb What if we sound him?

Bel Yes—if the time served

Enter BALEA

Bal Satraps! The king commands your presence at
 The feast to night

Bel To hear is to obey
 In the pavilion?

Bal No, here in the palace

Arb How! in the palace? it was not thus ordered

Bal It is so ordered now

Arb And why?

Bal I know not

May I retire?

Arb Stay

Bel (*to Arb aside*) Hush! let him go his way 110
 (*Alternately to Bal*) Yes Balea, thank the Monarch kiss
 the hem

Of his imperial robe and say his slaves
 Will take the crumbs he deigns to scatter from
 His royal table at the hour—was't midnight?

Bal It was the place the hall of Nimrod Lords
 I humble me before you and depart [*Exit BALEA*]

Arb I like not this same sudden change of place
 There is some mystery wherefore should he change it?

Bel Doth he not change a thousand times a day?
 Sloth is of all things the most fanciful— 120

And moves more parasangs in its intents
 Than generals in their marches when they seek
 To leave their foe at fault—Why dost thou muse?

Arb He loved that gay pavilion—it was ever
 His summer dotage

Bel And he loved his Queen—
 And thrice a thousand harlotry besides—
 And he has loved all things by turns except

Sal Is it even so, and must
I do the hangman's office? Recreants! see
How you should fell a traitor.

[SALEMENES attacks ARBACES]

Enter SARDANAPALUS and Train

Sar Hold your hands
Upon your lives, I say What, deaf or drunken?
My sword! O fool, I wear no sword here, fellow,
Give me thy weapon [To a Guard
[SARDANAPALUS snatches a sword from one of the
soldiers, and rushes between the combatants—they
separate

Sar In my very palace!
What hinders me from cleaving you in twain,
Audacious brawlers?

Bel Sire, your justice

Sal Or 180
Your weakness.

Sar (raising the sword) How?

Sal Strike! so the blow's repeated
Upon yon traitor—whom you spare a moment,
I trust, for torture I'm content

Sar What—him!
Who dares assail Arbaces?

Sal I!

Sar Indeed!
Prince, you forget yourself Upon what variant?

Sal (showing the signet) Thine

Arb (confused) The King's!

Sal Yes! and let the King confirm it

Sar I parted not from this for such a purpose.

Sal You parted with it for your safety I
Employed it for the best Pronounce in person
Here I am but your slave a moment past 190
I was your representative

Sar Then sheathe
Your swords

[ARBACES and SALEMENES return their swords to the
scabbards]

Sal Mine s sheathed I pray you sheathe *not* yours
Tis the sole sceptre left you now with safety

Sar A heavy one, the hilt too hurts my hand
(*To a Guard*) Here fellow, take thy weapon back Well
sirs

What doth this mean?

Bel The Prince must answer that

Sal Truth upon my part treason upon theirs

Sar Treason—Arbaces! treachery and Beleses!
That were an union I will not believe

Bel Where is the proof?

Sal I ll answer that if once too
The king demands your fellow traitor s sword

Arb (*to Sal*) A sword which hath been drawn as oft
as thine
Against his foes

Sal And now against his brother
And in an hour or so against himself

Sar That is not possible he dared not, no—
No—I ll not hear of such things These vain bickerings
Are spawned in courts by base intrigues and baser
Hirelings who live by lies on good men s lives
You must have been deceived my brother

Sal First
Let him deliver up his weapon, and 210
Proclaim himself your subject by that duty
And I will answer all

Sar Why, if I thought so—
But no it cannot be the Mede Arbaces—
The trusty rough true soldier—the best captain
Of all who discipline our nations No
I ll not insult him thus to bid him render
The scimitar to me he never yielded
Unto our enemies Chief, keep your weapon

Sal (*delivering back the signet*) Monarch take back
your signet

Sar No retain it
But use it with more moderation

Sal Sire, 220
I used it for your honour, and restore it
Because I cannot keep it with my own